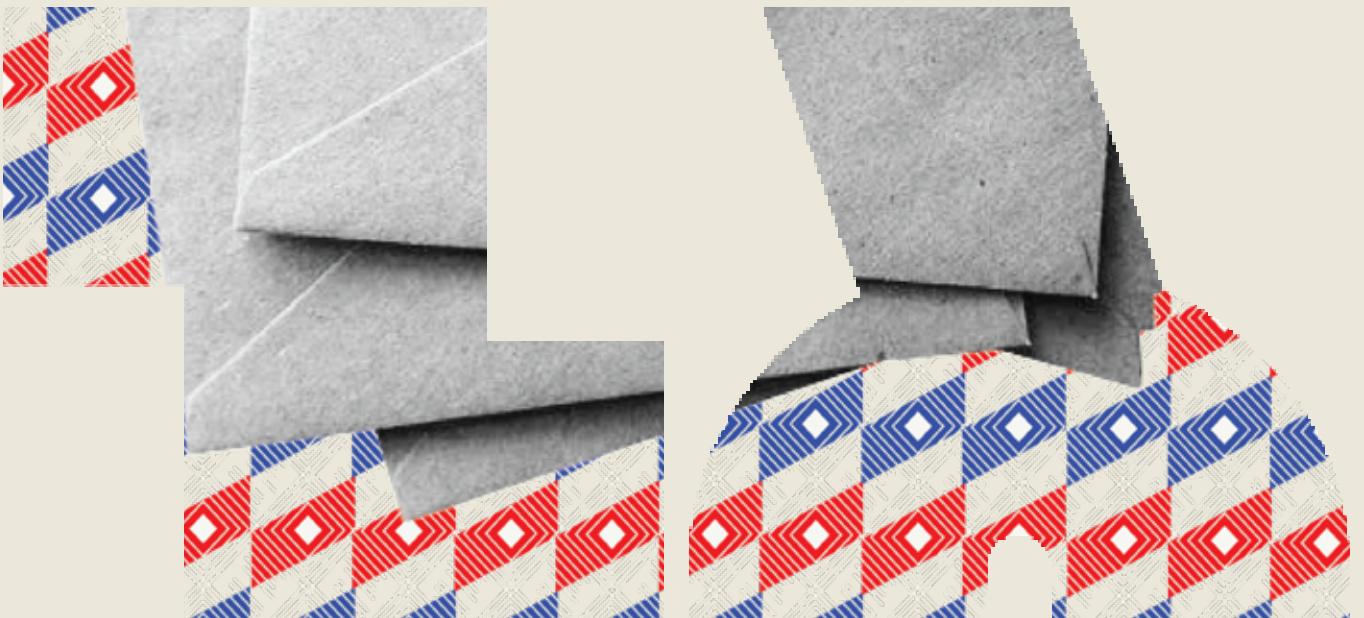


# Love Notes



March 2025  
Volume 05 Issue 01

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Nisnis - A quarterly magazine  
published by Queer Ethiopia  
focusing on LBQ issues

# QUEER ETHIOPIA

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“Queer Ethiopia” is an alternative space created by a group of queer Ethiopian women. It is designed to be a space for a diverse group of Ethiopian queer women whose sexual and gender identifications vary. It includes cis and trans women who may be lesbian, bisexual or asexual. This is a space where the experiences of queer people takes center stage. We hope to include personal experiences from our daily lives as queer people, various stories, interviews, original artwork and poetry. We hope it will also serve as a place where Ethiopians in Ethiopia and Ethiopians in the diaspora come as themselves to explore and create an online community.

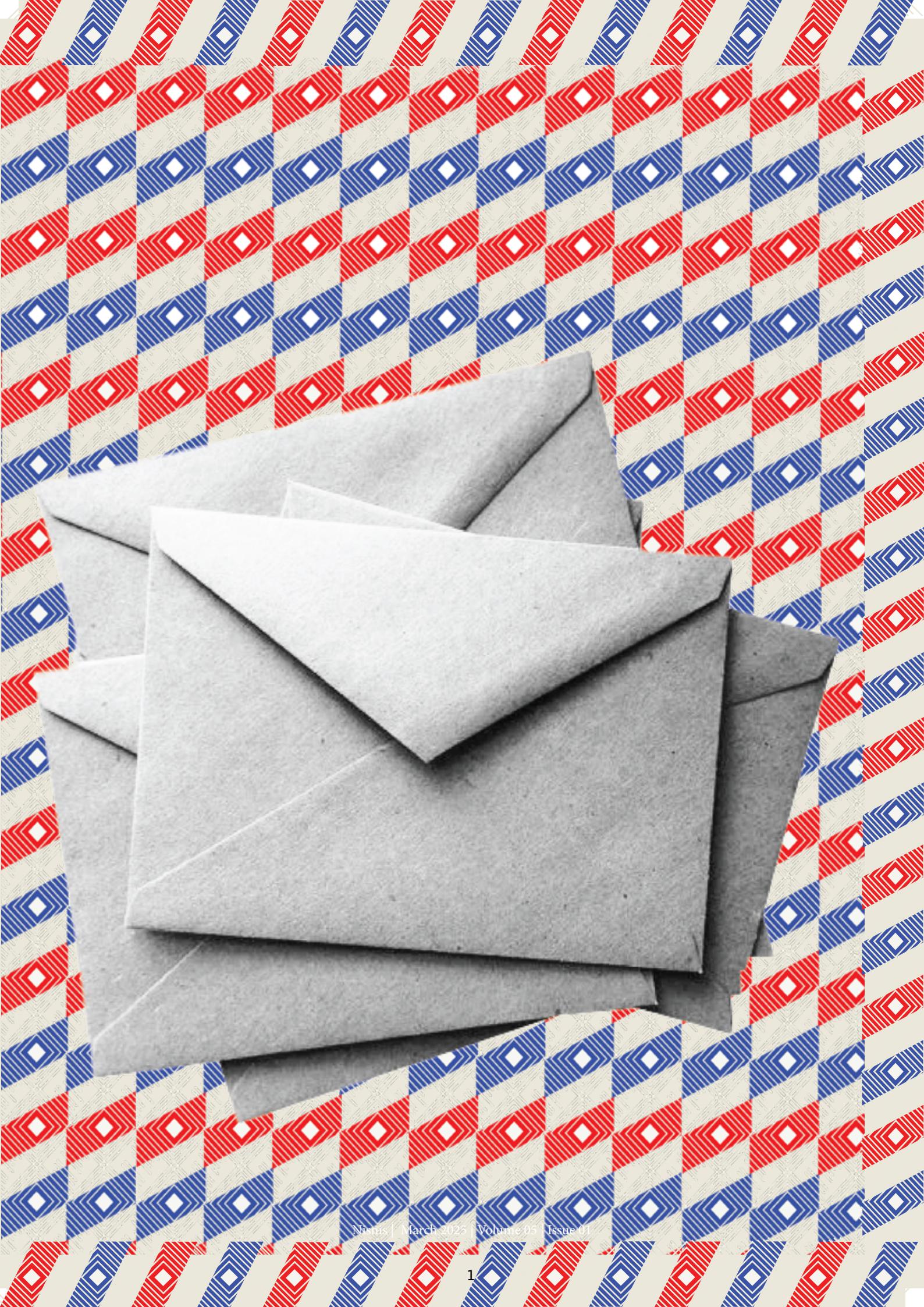
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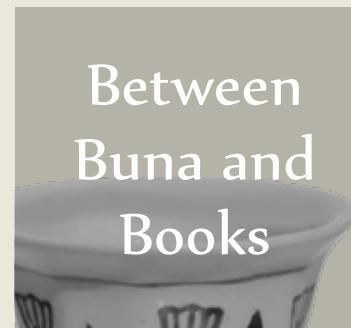
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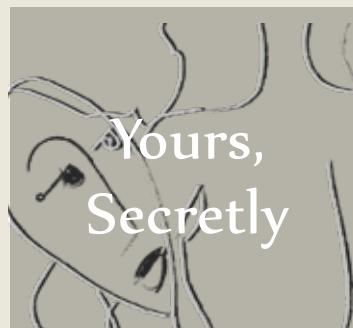
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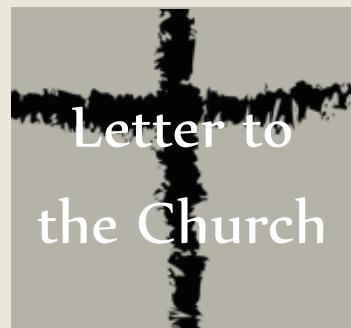
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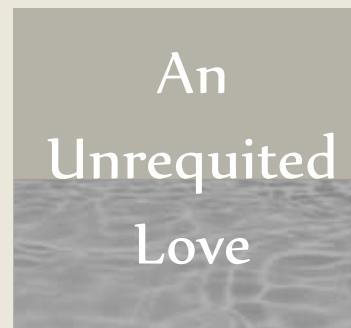
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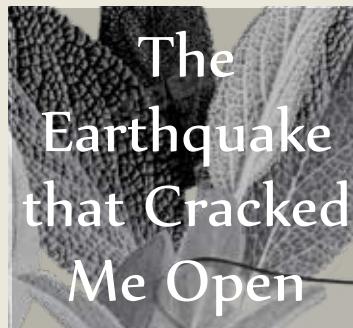
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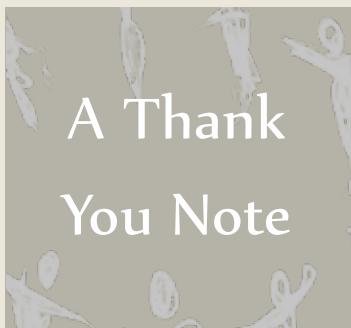
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## From the Editors

Dear Readers,

This issue is a collection of love letters—to partners, to ourselves, to the future. But first, we want to write ours to you.

As we publish our 15th issue of Nisnis, we are reminded that none of this would exist without your presence. From the stories you have shared - of first loves, chosen family, and reclaiming identity - to the way you have trusted us with your truths, you have shaped this community into something radiant. Thank you.

We see you. The ones who love fiercely in a world that often tries to silence or erase you. The ones who navigate life's ups and downs with resilience and grace. Your courage to be unapologetically yourself is a revolution in itself, and it reminds us daily that love, in all its forms, is what binds us together.

In these pages, we are building a space where every queer story is celebrated. Where joy is resistance, and where no one has to stand alone. Because your light - your particular, dazzling way of existing - matters.

So here's to you, our beloved community. Keep shining. Keep loving. And remember: from our first issue to this milestone, your trust has been our guiding light. We are never alone in this journey.

With love and solidarity,  
Queer Ethiopia

# Will We Live? A Queer Love Letter to Survival and Sunlight

Dear Future Via,

Hateful poison has permeated the world and is festering in the hearts of men. This hate has begun sowing fear into the world, the roots of that fear growing within me now as well, for myself and for freedom.

I want to know, I need to know. Are things in the future better?

Where do we live?

Are we in San Francisco, in a house by the coastline, with big bay windows, a jungle of plants lining the interior, and a pride flag hung up over the front door?

Are we in Thailand, in an apartment in Bangkok, where the city's enveloped in chronic insomnia, when the moon is hung high up in the sky, and the night is where we truly live out our days?

Do we miss the thin air and high altitude of the ever-imposing mountains of Addis, their crushing presence both liberating and terrifying all at once? Do we crave coming back as much as we do leaving? Is nostalgia the same plague it's always been, remembering only the sunny memories and none of the Rift Valley blues?

Is there love in our home? Not the Habesha brand love; that's so many things at once - layers of judgment beneath sickly sweet smiles, hiding who we are behind guarded fronts, full of cowardice as we ignore and become compliant to our friends' moral wrongdoings and political misalignments.

Is it queer love? Where family is not genetic but found. Where home is not made of brick and mortar, but the flesh and blood of people who accept all labels and identities without question.

Is there good food? Good people to share it with?

Are Sundays sacred for recovering from hangovers and decompressing from the work week's torment?

Does anyone know? Does Mom? Does Dad?

Do we ever get out?

So many questions mingle in my heart. Of who we are now and of where we are.

The people around us and the community we build.





**“Do we crave coming back as  
much as we crave leaving? ”**

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But I hope that we live, that we don't simply survive, but truly live.  
That we are unapologetically queer,  
For a light that shines through whatever darkness the universe may throw at us.

So despite all the hate that attempts to bury us alive, despite all the people that despise our existence. So let the hate try to bury us. We will live.

Love,  
Present Via

# Between Buna and Books: Notes from a Closeted Ally

To my queer siblings,

I don't remember how I became your ally. Actually, I don't even know if I became one or if I just always was. There's no before and after, no light bulb moment, no dramatic awakening where I threw off the chains of homophobia and stepped into the light of acceptance.

I just... never saw anything wrong with you.

Which is kind of surprising, considering where I grew up. Ethiopia isn't exactly a safe space for anyone who doesn't fit inside the tiny, suffocating box the culture built for us. It's a country where

homophobia isn't just normal, it's expected. People say the most violent, terrifying things about you over buna. They talk about hunting you down, killing you, and they say it with a smile, like it's just another Wednesday. It's not whispered. It's not shameful. It's loud and proud.

And yet, somehow, none of that stuck to me. I didn't have the words for who you were back then, I grew up without the internet, and the first time I got a phone with actual working data was around grade 11. By then I was 15, maybe 16, and even then, I don't remember stumbling across anything about queerness right away.

But even without knowing, I never remember



**“I’m writing this letter to say  
you’re not alone. Not all of us  
are out to hurt you. ”**

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being against you.

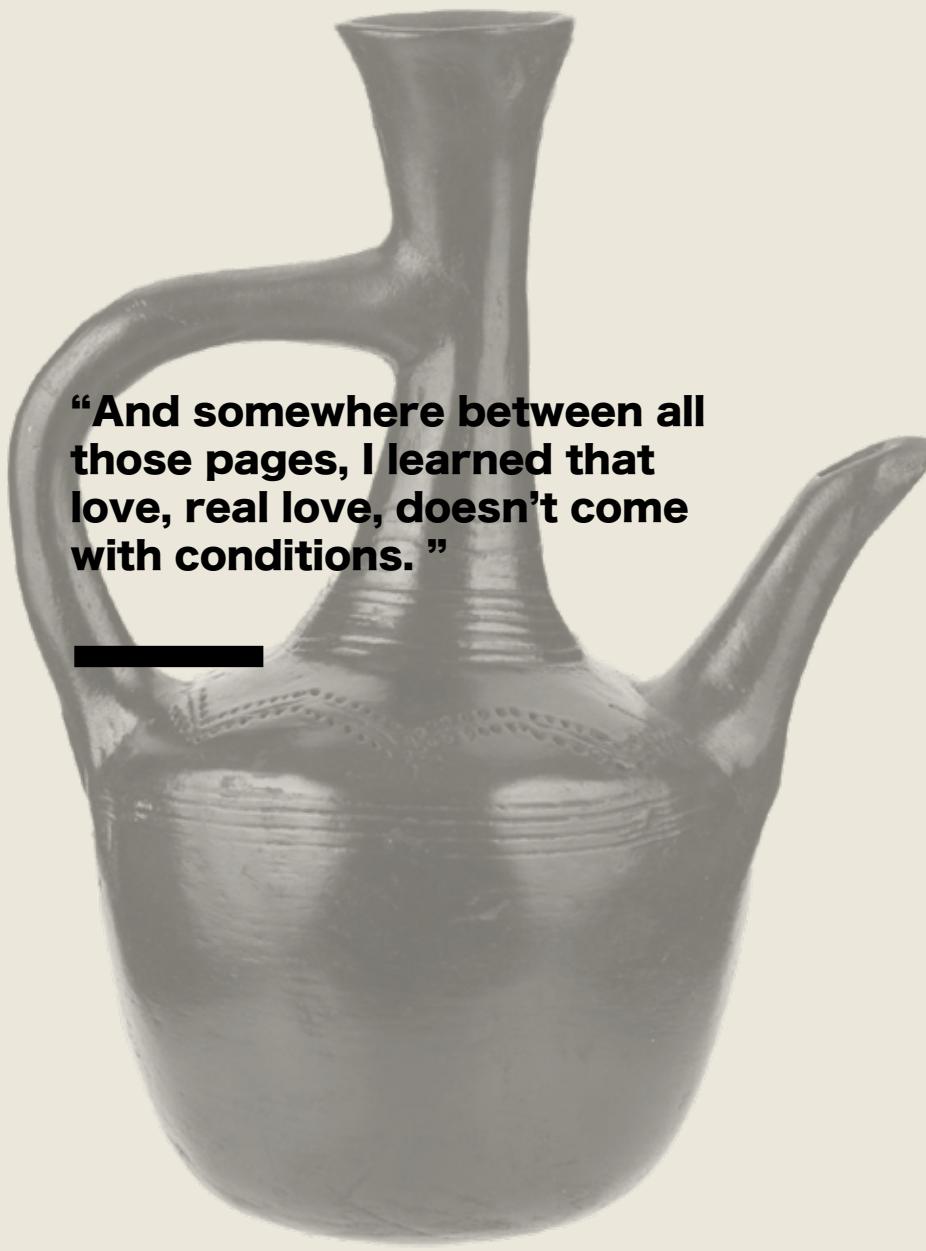
I think books saved me. Books made me empathetic before I even knew the word for it. They taught me to ask questions instead of just swallowing the answers I was given. They showed me that people are never just what they appear to be, there's always a backstory, always a reason, always more.

And somewhere between all those pages, I learned that love, real love, doesn't come with conditions.

I've never really been religious. Sure, I went to church as a kid because my parents were part of it, but belief never took root in me. Sometimes I wonder,

if I had been a true believer, would I feel differently about you? But then I think, if I believed in a god, wouldn't that god love you too? Wouldn't it make more sense that a god would care about kindness over control?

But in Ethiopia, even being your ally feels dangerous. Even saying, “I don’t hate them,” feels like a confession. Most people I know, even the ones I love, are proudly, aggressively homophobic. The kind of homophobic that’s convinced hate is holy. So I don’t talk about it much. For safety. For peace. Only the people I trust with my life know where I really stand.



**“And somewhere between all  
those pages, I learned that  
love, real love, doesn’t come  
with conditions.”**

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Even with them, it's not easy. Every time the conversation comes up, I have to make a choice, do I argue? Do I explain? Do I remind them that the Jesus they love so much said to love everyone? And if they really believe being queer is a sin, isn't their job to pray, not play executioner?

But that's a conversation that could last forever. So most of the time, I settle for something simpler:

"Even if you don't agree, can't you just let people be? You don't have to understand. You don't have to like it. Just... don't be a hater."

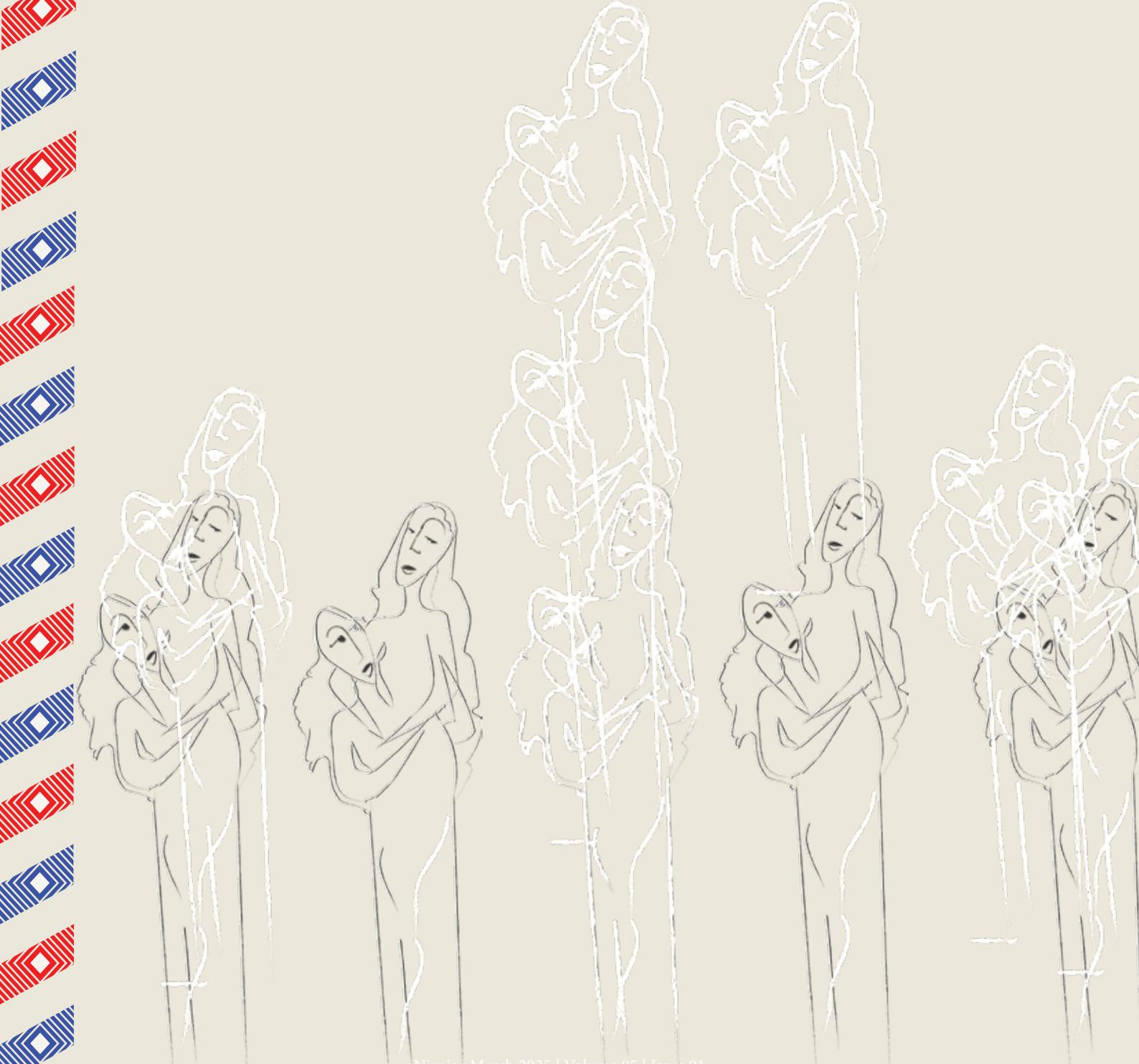
It's such a low bar, but somehow, here, even that feels too high.

I'm writing this letter to say, you're not alone. Not all of us are out to hurt you. Some of us are still learning, still unlearning, still figuring out all the ways we were conditioned to look at the world. I'm sure I have a lot to learn about your experiences, about what it really means to stand with you, not just quietly agree from the sidelines. But even with all I don't know, I know this:

You deserve love. You deserve safety. You deserve to exist fully, not just survive in pieces. And even if I can't always say it out loud, I need you to know that there are people, even here, who believe that too.

With love, and with the hope that love will someday be louder than hate.

# Yours, Secretly: Letters From the Closet





My Love,

9 years. 9 years of loving you in the shadows, of holding my breath every time someone got too curious, of pretending we were just friends when my heart was screaming that you are so much more. 9 years of stolen moments, whispered words, and learning to love in a world that refuses to make space for us.

It hasn't been easy. We've endured the weight of silence, the fear of being discovered. We have had to smile through conversations where people spoke against love like ours, staying quiet to protect what they didn't even know existed. There were days when the loneliness of secrecy felt unbearable, when I wondered if loving you in the open would ever be possible.

Friends have left. Some who once stood beside us, laughing and sharing memories, slowly faded away when they began to suspect the truth. Others turned cold, their words cutting like knives, reminding us that in their eyes, our love was something unnatural—something to be erased. And yet, through all of it, through every betrayal, every moment of fear, every silent tear, one

thing has never changed: us. We are still here. Still standing. Still choosing each other. Still loving as fiercely as we did on the very first day. If anything, I love you even more now. Because through it all, we have held onto each other, refusing to let go even when the world tried to pull us apart.

There are days when I ache for a different world—a world where I could hold your hand without looking over my shoulder, where our love could be celebrated instead of hidden. A world where we wouldn't have to speak in code or love behind locked doors. And though we don't have that world yet, we have this. We have each other. And that is more powerful than any law, any prejudice, any hatred.

I don't know what the future holds. But I do know this: in every version of life, in every possible universe, in every way that I am able—I will love you. No matter the circumstances, no matter the obstacles, I will choose you again and again.

One day, I hope we will wake up in a world where we no longer have to hide. A world where I can tell everyone just how deeply I love you. Until then, I will keep loving you quietly, fiercely, endlessly.

Because you, my love, are worth it all.

Yours, always and forever.

# Letter to the Church

Dear Church,

I write this letter with a trembling kind of hope. It is the church that raised me; a place I always believed was built to offer love, support, and comfort. But as I came to understand my identity as a queer person, I quickly realized that this place, which was meant to be a refuge, had instead become the source of my deepest wounds.

The message I received from the church about my identity was painfully clear: That I was a sinner. That I was unworthy of love. That I was beneath everyone else. For years, I carried the heavy burden of believing I had to separate myself from God's love because of who I am. The sermons, the whispers, the teachings, all reinforced the idea that my love was impure. To someone simply wanting to love and be loved, these words were a crushing weight.

But I am living proof that even a battlefield can become a place of healing, of rebuilding, and of peace. I survived. Even when I was hurt, even when I was hated, I survived. In my loneliness, I found strength, resilience, and a deeper understanding of my faith. And my faith was often untouched by the narrow, bitter interpretations preached from the stage.

Today, I understand that love, true love, is not limited by gender or sexuality. Love is divine. I share my story not to provoke, but to shed light on the harm caused by teachings that condemn, judge, and exclude. The emotional toll of such messages is not abstract. Many queer people, due to being rejected by the church, have been driven to self-harm, to silence, or to despair. The very words we hear in places of worship, about the God we believe in, become weapons against us.

For too long, the church has taught us that we do not belong, that we are not part of the community.

But we do belong. We are members. We always have

# the church



been. Our love is sacred. Our existence is valid. And no church, no community, no doctrine can take that away from us. After years of rejection, I am still on a journey of healing. I am learning to fully love myself. I have come to embrace my queerness as beautiful and an essential part of who I am. And through this journey, I've come to understand that God's love is not conditional, it is wide, welcoming, and unshakable.

To churches everywhere: I give you permission to repair the harm your teachings have caused. And I hope the day comes when the message you preach of love and acceptance truly reflects what you stand for. I want us to create a space where we love without preconditions and accept everyone. And especially, I long for a time when those like me, those rejected and cast aside, are gathered in again.

I still hope that one day, the Church will become a true sanctuary. A place where love is boundless and offered freely to all. And we, queer people, are part of that love, we always have been.

# How Unrequited Love Became My Greatest Gift



Dear First Love,

It's been almost four years since I last saw you. Painful, yes - but I've accepted it as a part of life.

I've even come to terms with the fact that you couldn't love me, not just the distance between us, but your inability to love me.

You weren't made to be like me. You are who you are, and your love is for women.

From the moment I first saw you, I liked you. Maybe it was your beauty that drew me in. And when you realized how I felt and still didn't change, I respected you even more.

Many have changed after learning the truth about me, but you didn't. You didn't want to change my identity as someone who loves men.

Your words "Be yourself" meant everything. They changed me.

I thought I understood love. But loving you made me stop hating myself. Your love slowly began to wash away the hate and sorrow that had built up inside me. I was like a glass jar full of shame, but your love came in and slowly cleared me out.

What greater love is there than the one that cleanses the mess inside of us?

Who knows? Maybe you just didn't care, that's why you said "be as you are". But you letting me be my true self helped me see myself differently. You didn't open my eyes, but the feeling of love that formed inside me because of you, that was real.

So thank you.

Thank you for the honesty you showed me, and for allowing me a space to be myself without shame.

I still remember your scent from the nights you hugged me to greet me but I have also forgotten it. Would I have ever accepted myself had I not met you? I don't know.

But God must have wanted me to change so He brought you into my life.

And for that, you will  
always have my gratitude. You became a part of my life.

I am not suffering from wanting to be with you, missing you, or loving you, because love doesn't destroy. It transforms. It fills us with peace. And even if you will never read it I want to say "I love you".

I wish you a life filled with calm, joy, success, love, and freedom, with the woman you love.

**"What greater love is there  
than the one that cleanses the  
mess inside of us?"**

# The Earthquake that Cracked Me Open:



Nisnisi March 2016

# How I Learned to Love - and Be Loved - Without Apology

My love,

Therapy smells like sage and sunlight, but don't let the cozy room fool you — it's where I go to war. My therapist, a feisty woman with framed degrees and zero patience for evasion, once quietly draped a weighted blanket over me as I sobbed. Trauma is heavy, and I had been carrying it like it was mine to hold alone.

Therapy is hard work. I have always believed, at least theoretically, that therapy is a good thing, it not only informs us about our past but leads us to a better future and helps us understand who we are and how we came to be. I just never thought that I needed one. I always thought that I was a well-adjusted human who only needed to read a few self-help books and listen to podcasts to make small tweaks to better myself.

That was until I sat in the proverbial chair. On my first day, my therapist offered me water from a lovely glass jug and began the session. I didn't know what to expect. She was kind and patient, asking several questions about what I wanted from therapy. I wasn't entirely clear on what being in therapy entailed, but I felt that the only way to navigate it was to be as honest as possible — with myself and with her.

I was upfront on my first visit and on the intake form I filled out before my session. Therapy wasn't my idea, but I was willing — eager, even — to pursue it if it made a positive difference.

I expected the first few weeks to be easy, like riding a bike with training wheels until we got to the real thing, but the wheels came off during just my

third session. I don't know if it is the hallmark of a good therapist or a good therapee, but she had me baring my soul by then. I didn't realize how much I was holding on until the floodgates opened. I remember crying to the point of heaving which was quite the experience for someone who almost never cries. The therapist put a weighted blanket on me, perhaps an apt metaphor for the way some experiences had weighted me down in life. Funny how lightness comes from letting the weight exist—not from pretending it isn't there.

That session was a turning point. A glutton for punishment, I kept coming back every week, chipping away at all my troubles. I expected my therapist to adopt the classic image of a therapist — perhaps rubbing her chin thoughtfully and responding with generic prompts like, "Tell me more." But she was far from my stereotype. Instead of remaining distant, she shared her own life experiences and led with questions: What are the lessons in that? What did that bring up for you? Where did that take you?

I am not sure I had the answers all the time, but as she advised, I was running toward my trauma. I explored and asked myself questions. I went back to my siblings and inquired about our collective childhood. Nothing was off-limits: How did we experience love in our family? How did our parents navigate issues of money? What kind of environment did I grow up in? What were our family dynamics? How did we solve conflict? How did I become who I am?

Thanks to my therapist, I quickly gained the terminology needed to ask even deeper questions. How did I draw my sense of worth? What made



me feel deserving? What shame did I carry in my body? I remember sitting there, holding my stomach because exploring certain issues shocked my nervous system. Tears ran down my face as we did container exercises, the only way I could leave my therapy session regulated and come for more work. I tapped endlessly. How did it feel to be me? I struggled to understand what made me worthy and deserving and why I carried so much shame.

The irony? The more I owned my shame, the less power it had. I remember that you had warned me about that a few years ago.

I discovered my “selflessness” was codependency, drawing my sense of worth from helping others. This was a blow for someone who always believed my actions were selfless. I discovered I had deep money trauma that made it hard to spend on myself because I felt inherently unworthy. It was a shame tattoo that loudly whispered, “You are not worth it.\* I also learned that I was conflict-avoidant, wanting to keep the peace regardless of how much havoc it created inside me. In some ways, I realized I mirrored my father,



perpetuating some of the difficulties he caused in my mother’s life. Trauma is a strange phenomenon; it can make you simultaneously a victim and a perpetrator. As my therapist says, two things can be true at the same time.

I’m proud of the woman I’m becoming - though I wish she hadn’t needed the threat of loss to emerge.

My love,

As gut-wrenching as therapy has been, I ran toward my trauma not to win, but because I was finally tired of running away. You had repeatedly told me that, I just hadn’t been ready to listen.

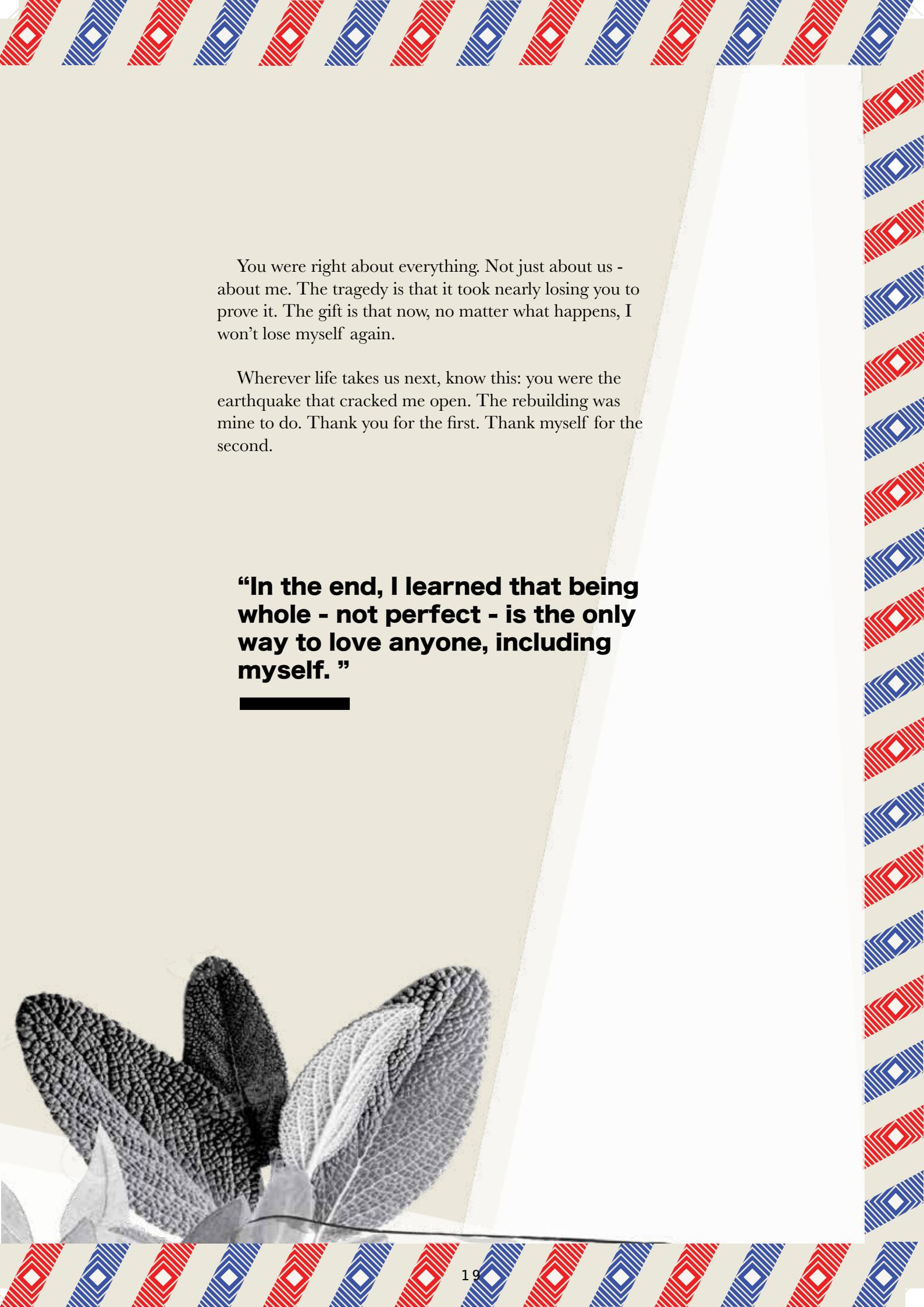
I shut down when you needed tough conversations. I dragged my feet financially. I made myself your responsibility instead of your partner. You begged to feel seen. I didn’t understand — until therapy forced me to see myself.

Now I do. And while I can’t rewrite history, I can honor it by changing — not for you, but because of you.

Therapy was your suggestion — first for us, then for me. You expected better of me. You asked that I show up better for you. You knew what you deserved. I started therapy because you suggested couple’s therapy, and the therapist recommended I first do a few sessions alone. I agreed because the thought of losing you terrified me. Now I stay because I’m finally meeting the woman I had abandoned long ago: myself.

In the end, I learned that being whole — not perfect — is the only way to love anyone, including myself.

I am a work in progress. Some days, the progress is a quiet thing — letting myself cry without judging it as “weak,” saying “no” when I would have once people-pleased, sitting with discomfort instead of numbing it. Other days, it’s louder: it is demanding my siblings show up to care for our mother, settling payments on time, or standing firm in my boundaries — even when my voice shakes.



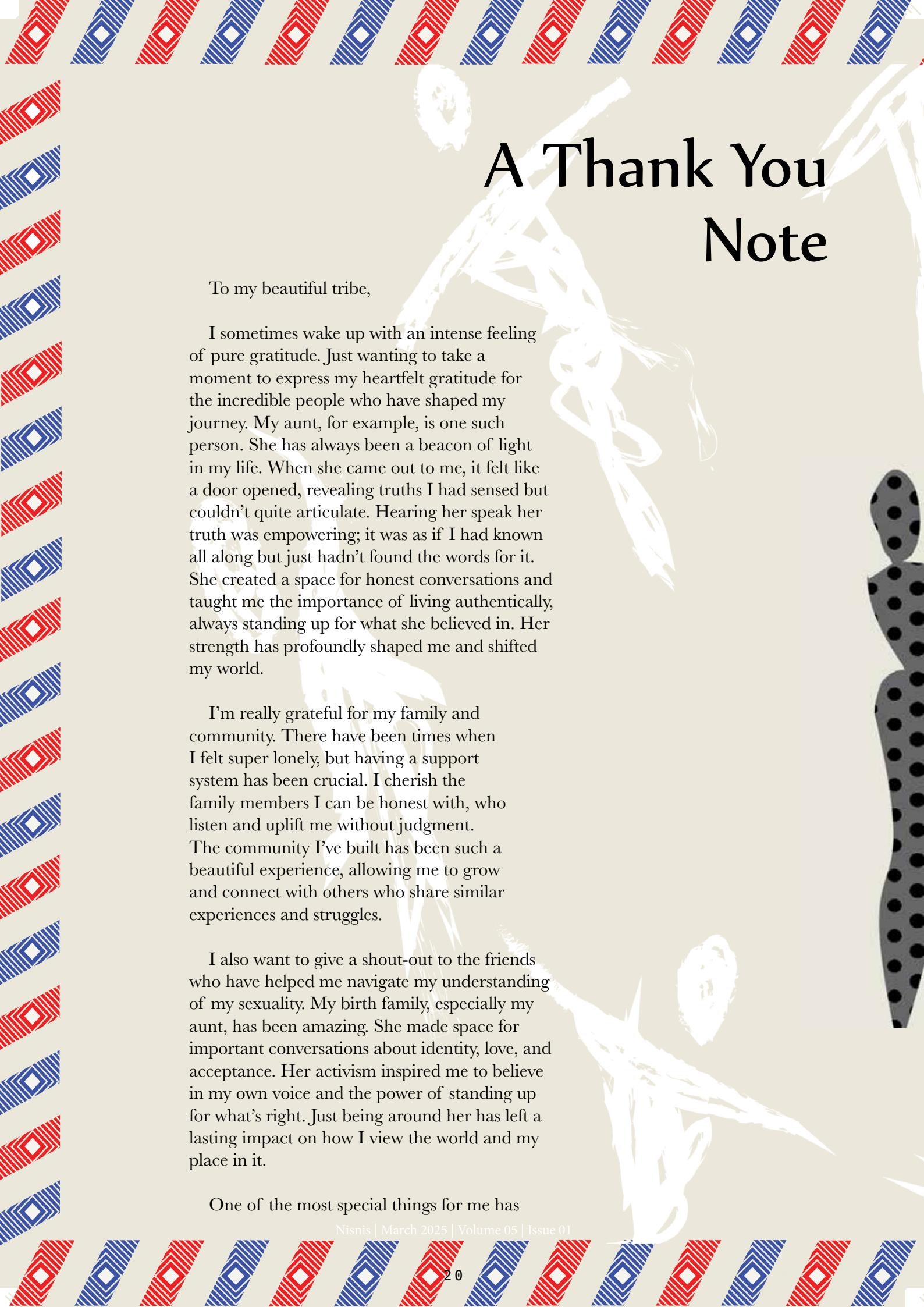
You were right about everything. Not just about us - about me. The tragedy is that it took nearly losing you to prove it. The gift is that now, no matter what happens, I won't lose myself again.

Wherever life takes us next, know this: you were the earthquake that cracked me open. The rebuilding was mine to do. Thank you for the first. Thank myself for the second.

**“In the end, I learned that being whole - not perfect - is the only way to love anyone, including myself. ”**

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# A Thank You Note

To my beautiful tribe,

I sometimes wake up with an intense feeling of pure gratitude. Just wanting to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude for the incredible people who have shaped my journey. My aunt, for example, is one such person. She has always been a beacon of light in my life. When she came out to me, it felt like a door opened, revealing truths I had sensed but couldn't quite articulate. Hearing her speak her truth was empowering; it was as if I had known all along but just hadn't found the words for it. She created a space for honest conversations and taught me the importance of living authentically, always standing up for what she believed in. Her strength has profoundly shaped me and shifted my world.

I'm really grateful for my family and community. There have been times when I felt super lonely, but having a support system has been crucial. I cherish the family members I can be honest with, who listen and uplift me without judgment. The community I've built has been such a beautiful experience, allowing me to grow and connect with others who share similar experiences and struggles.

I also want to give a shout-out to the friends who have helped me navigate my understanding of my sexuality. My birth family, especially my aunt, has been amazing. She made space for important conversations about identity, love, and acceptance. Her activism inspired me to believe in my own voice and the power of standing up for what's right. Just being around her has left a lasting impact on how I view the world and my place in it.

One of the most special things for me has



# to the People Who Made Me Brave

been the freedom to explore my questions and concerns in a safe environment with the people I call family. Their love and acceptance have changed how I see myself. Even though we're open about things, I often feel overwhelmed by questions. When it comes to my bisexuality, I've struggled with confusion. I've mostly been in relationships with men, and there have been times when I felt like an imposter in the queer community because of that. But having someone reassure me that my feelings are valid—and that it's okay to identify as I do—has made a huge difference.

Right now, I don't face many challenges because I'm in a relationship with a man, and people tend to assume I'm straight. But fear is always there in the background for me. My safety has been compromised in the past, which keeps me on guard. It's a reminder that while I may feel accepted in many spaces, there are still risks that come with being myself.

Gratitude is so important. It reminds me that we're not alone in this journey. There are people who love us, care for us, and hold space for our truths. Sometimes, we get so caught up in our own heads that we forget to see the support around us. If you open your heart, you might be surprised by how many people want to lift you up and cherish you. I'm really grateful for that reminder—that love is always around us, waiting to embrace us.

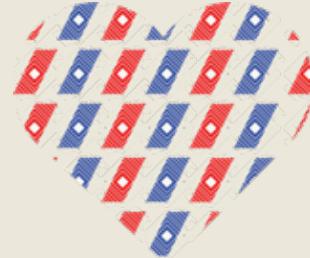
Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts. I hope you find your own circles of support and love, and remember that you're never truly alone. You are surrounded by an amazing tribe that will continue to lift you.

With love and gratitude,

### Betselot

Ohhhh በዕለተ... You're different, to me you're next level of special. Forget about how much I love you because, honestly, I don't even know how to measure it. My betsī, I don't just talk about love. አዕስ አይደለም, I prove it. I work my butt off literally seven days a week, pulling 98+ hours just so you can feel confident, capable, and comfortable. ከምንም አንስ አንድተረ አልፈልግም. Clothes? Food? Materials? Happiness? Handled. በቻቻ አንድተሰበ, 🌸 You, Your family? Your friends? If they're smiling, I'm winning. 😊 I love you so much that I refuse to let your name be in bad stories.

I love you so much that seeing you sad, anxious, or down, makes me stress to find out the reason and need to know why just so I could fix it, because your happiness is my happiness. በቻ when I say I love you... I mean it. I really do. And let's be real nobody, and I mean nobody, loves you like I do. Not even your mama (no offense, mom 😊). I'm your day one, the first person who literally handed over their heart just to see you happy. So please, I beg you, don't go falling for people who don't love you like I do. Because when you're hurt, I'm hurt and we both know that we don't do well with heartbreak. So, baby girl, listen up, don't keep confusing me following your heart. Just be with me just so we can be at the top of wealth, health, peace... I love you. Deeply, ridiculously, undeniably. And that's that. 😊😊😊



### Gebreala

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ነው:: መከና በደ 😊

Gebreala

You!

Success isn't only about achieving. It's also about facing the truth, admitting loss.

Fighting a rock is foolishness. Walking away is winning. And you have that strength in you.



### Kidu

Kiduye ayezosh anchi tenkara nash  
hulun badel talfiwalsh 🤝😊 naw melat  
erasen

### Kidu

I tell myself, "It's okay, Kidu!" You are strong. You will come out of all the hurt.

# "Write a love letter to yourself"



### Red

Hi red tastaweshaleh bechegnenetshen eyasebsh raseshen yetelashebachew gizewoche zare alfewal zare sew nesh zare hiwot aleshe zare leraseshe fker alesh ahun negen begugut yemetetebki lij honeshal tewat kealgash menesaten atferim nege demo kezarewa red yeteshalsh sew tehognaleh yene bale testfa nurilegne nuroshen edmeshen befker tegbesh antu teblesh belij lij tekebesh erefi

### Red

Hi Red,

Remember the days you hated yourself, thinking of your loneliness? Today, all of that has passed. You love yourself now. You wait for tomorrow with excitement. You are no longer afraid to wake up in the morning. And tomorrow, you will become a better version of today's Red. My hopeful girl, May you live a long life—one filled with love, surrounded by grandkids.



### Gloria

Dear Gloria... You are so beautiful inside and out... I love how you strive to be a better person and how you keep progressing despite all the difficulties and responsibilities life places on your shoulders.. You are strong and smart, and you always find a way to overcome life's obstacles..

I am so proud of the continuous progress you are making in your life..

Keep going, keep fighting... I am certain you will become the woman you've always dreamed of being.

I love you so much...



### Baki

የፍቅርን ሁ... ሁንጻምር ተከ ይልሆል? ገኩለ  
ህያናት : ልማት ንበርን :: ነፃከ ከማወችን ስፍትኩ  
ስልክ ተስፋክልኩ እየሆኩ ከአንተ ይርኩ  
ስልክ በክፍውም በደንታም አመታትን አልፈን ክፍም  
አኩሯ አለን :: በደረሰሰን የገር ሁሉ ተንተሱን :  
መልካምነትኩን : ለለሎችም አሳሽ, መሆኑን :  
ባህረናና በአጠቃላይ አንተዎንሱን ወደልሆሉ ::  
ሁለም የንተወውን :: ክፍም በርታልኩ!  
አሳሳኑ አፍቃርኑ እኔ

### Baki

Do you remember when we started learning the ABCs of love? We were just kids. I've been obsessed with you ever since. I cared for you, and I told you I'd always be there. We've been through the good years and the bad—and yet, here we are. Through it all, I've seen your strength, your kindness, and the way you care for others. I love your personality, and most of all, I love that you are you. Always yours. Keep going. With love and care, Me.